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One of the first women to sign on as a secret agent during WWII, Louise Bushnell faced risk—and romance—for her country.

A MOST CIVILIZED SPY

By Neal Hirschfeld

ON A SWELTERING SUMMER DAY when the rest of the world is tugging off jackets and loosening ties, a tall, handsome woman of aristocratic bearing seats herself primly at a table in the Palm Court of the Plaza Hotel. Looking crisp and cool, she nonchalantly peels off her elbow-length black gloves and brushes a gold-plated lighter past the tip of her filtered cigaret.

"Yes, Madame?" inquires the white-jacketed waiter as the violinist and the pianist near the potted palms break into a medley of sugary Viennese waltzes.

"Iced tea," the mysterious woman replies, enunciating her consonants with the letter-perfect crispness of someone accustomed to speaking what sounds more like "British" than English.

The woman turns to the reporter who has come to hear her story. Pursing her lips, tilting her head sideways and arching one eyebrow for emphasis, she fixes him in a steady gaze with her fine gray eyes, eyes that shine with warmth and wit. "You know," she begins, sounding very much like Katharine Hepburn, "my mother always told me that there are only three times when a proper lady should allow her name to appear in the newspapers—the day she's born, the day she gets married . . . and the day she dies."

At 74, but looking younger, Louise Bushnell is quite the proper lady. She comes from English stock and can trace her roots in this country to the 17th century. Although they may not have shared the same pew, her father and John D. Rockefeller did attend the same church. She was educated at the Spence School in Manhattan, and later in Paris and Switzerland, and she sprinkles French verbs and bons mots into her conversation without the slightest affectation. At the same time, she has a way of inflecting English words—like "*ter*-ibly" and "*extraw*-d'nary" and "*ab*-so-*lute*ly"—that brings new life to them. She lives in a spacious and elegant book-lined apartment just off Fifth Avenue which, though she dismisses it as "very small," looks to the rest of the world like the set of a Noel Coward play about the well-to-do. And despite her pooh-poohing ("it isn't money that counts—it's quality"), she is listed in the end-all of blueblood scorecards, the Social Register.

Assets like these proved invaluable during those dark and dangerous years of World War II, when New York still harbored Nazi sympathizers. For it was then, while serving as the representative of a nameless American benefactor who purportedly wished to spend $10 million to rebuild the schools of war-torn Europe, that Louise Bushnell made important inroads among upper-class Germans, Belgians and other expatriates in this country. Captivated by this striking woman with the kind of cheekbones that a high-fashion model would envy, the Europeans wined and dined her and confided in her, some even volunteering their genuine admiration for a man named Hitler and what he was attempting to do. A few romanced her, and there was at least one, shall we say, liaison.

What her admirers didn't know was that the story about an American millionaire was just so much buncombe, a cover she had concocted to pump them for information about the internal politics of their homelands. "One does what one has to do," she says now of her attachments, choosing her words with discretion. The technical term for what she was doing was "counterintelli-

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